



AN EVER-SAFER CULTURE

THE FA SAFEGUARDING STRATEGY 2024-28

ANNUAL REVIEW & REPORT – YEAR 1



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Acronyms: The following acronyms (in alphabetical order) are used at points in our strategy: ED&I = Equality, Diversity & Inclusion EFL = English Football League EFLitC = English Football League in the Community ESFA = English Schools’ Football Association ISFA = Independent Schools Football Association LCA = League Coaches Association LMA = League Managers Association NSPCC CPSU = NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit NPCC = National Police Chiefs’ Council PFA = Professional Footballers’ Association	PGMO = Professional Game Match Officials PL = Premier League PLF = Premier League Foundation The FA = The Football Association The FA NLS = The FA National League System The FA WNL = The FA Women’s National League WFP = Women’s Football Pyramid WPLL = Women’s Professional Leagues Limited (re-named WSL Football, May 2025) WSL = Women’s Super League
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CONSTANT COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING



Mark Bullingham
Chief Executive, The FA

This Annual Review is tangible evidence of our constant commitment to safeguarding in English football. It details work that we have undertaken in recent times to ensure that our national game is played and enjoyed in ever-safer environments, everywhere, every time – and by everyone. To support our work, and in response to increased need, we have recruited additional staff to our safeguarding teams.

I want to be clear that our vigilance across safeguarding will never diminish. While we are making progress, child abuse has and does take place in football, as it does in wider society. Whether it’s lower-level concerns impacting children and adults at risk, or abuse with statutory agencies leading the investigations, we’re constantly seeking to mitigate these risks.

Our current safeguarding data shows that cases of sexual abuse continue to be perpetrated by people in positions of trust and influence, including those undertaking coaching and mentoring activity. That’s why raising awareness and educating about healthy positive and professional boundaries and relationships, as well as the ways power can be abused and what grooming is, continue to be a priority. The case study on pages 46-49 of our Annual Review highlights some of this awareness-raising work.

Meanwhile, underpinning our everyday work is the support we provide to embed safeguarding culture and practice at every level of the game in this country. We drive this work alongside our stakeholders, with robust standards for clubs, leagues, and County FAs. The men’s and women’s professional game are fully committed to this end, as are the football club charities that have a vast local reach, alongside the men’s and women’s National Leagues and the County FAs.

Simultaneously, we have established an extensive education programme to empower everyone in football to not just acknowledge the importance of safeguarding but make sure they can practise it in whatever role they play. In addition to the mandatory online and virtual courses, a significant body of continuous education is being delivered across the country by the professional leagues and clubs and our County FAs.

The third arm of our ongoing safeguarding work focuses on how to report a concern – and in turn what could constitute such a concern. We have created clarity for those in football about reporting processes – and we have also taken important steps to ensure that those on the sidelines, such as parents or carers, know how to create positive football spaces and how to act if they are unhappy about a situation. And, if we receive a referral, we ensure the risks and fully assessed, taking any actions swiftly and effectively.

At the heart of all our work are the most vulnerable in our society – children – anyone aged under 18, and adults at risk. We are determined to ensure that children’s voices are heard, and that their views help to shape safeguarding policies and practice. Another key set of voices are those that belong to the survivors of childhood sexual abuse in football and I would like to thank all the members of our Survivor Support and Safeguarding Advisory Group for their continued invaluable insights and advice.

This Annual Review highlights the spectrum of safeguarding work that’s been undertaken in the first year of our latest strategy. Safeguarding will remain core to what we do, and our united safeguarding work will continue to the highest professional standards.

OUR SIGNATORIES AND SUPPORTERS

Our strategy is endorsed by the football authorities



MARK BULLINGHAM
Chief Executive,
The FA



RICHARD MASTERS
Chief Executive,
Premier League



TREVOR BIRCH
Chief Executive,
EFL



NIKKI DOUCET
Chief Executive,
WSL Football



MAHETA MOLANGO
Chief Executive,
PFA



RICHARD BEVAN
Chief Executive,
LMA



DANIELLE EVERY
Chief Operating Officer,
PGMO

ENDORSEMENT BY MEMBERS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE ON THE FA SURVIVOR SUPPORT AND SAFEGUARDING ADVISORY GROUP:

Having a clear strategy and action plan is vital if everyone in football is to play their part in creating an ever-safer environment within our game.

This Year 1 review of the 2024-28 strategy documents actions taken to deliver and enhance safeguarding culture and practice in 2024/25.

We're proud of the progress that's been made this season and that we've continued to contribute directly to this work, through meetings, campaigns, club visits, films, presentations, and FA staff training.

Making the game as safe as possible for everyone is the firm intention, and we take our responsibility to check and challenge the way The FA goes about this work very seriously.

The FA Survivor Support and Safeguarding Advisory Group (FASSSAG) was formed in 2018, comprising former players who suffered childhood sexual abuse in football, alongside independent professionals in safeguarding. FASSSAG has an important role in challenging and informing The FA's thinking in relation to all safeguarding matters and initiatives. You can read more about FASSSAG's role [here](#).

Everyday delivery everywhere

While central safeguarding strategy and policy-making is led by The FA, the 50-strong County FA network, the ESFA and ISFA, NLS (National League System) and WFP (Women's Football Pyramid) play critical roles in ensuring safeguarding is at the forefront of grassroots participation, schools' association football activity and NLS and WFP club football. This includes driving an ever-safer culture and compliance with requirements and standards.

Collectively, all the above organisations, whose logos are shown alongside, are responsible for:

- Driving safer cultures and ensuring the safeguarding standards set out by The FA are met.
- Promoting The FA's safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Supporting the volunteer workforce in their work to create safe environments and practice.
- Working with their members to ensure they are meeting their commitment to safeguard and protect children, young people and for County FAs, NLS and WFP to safeguard and protect adults at risk.
- Working with The FA's Safeguarding Case Management Team to manage concerns.

You can contact your County FA DSO [here](#), the ESFA [here](#) and the ISFA [here](#).

...and all supported by:

Effective collaboration with like-minded organisations is also pivotal to delivering our strategy. These organisations include, but are not limited to:

	FA National Youth Council		UEFA
	Premier League Foundation		FIFA
	EFL in the Community		NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)
	The League Coaches Association (LCA)		The Ann Craft Trust
	Association of Colleges Sport		Hydrant Programme
	British Universities and Colleges Sport		IICSA (Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse) Changemakers



YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

1. GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS

40%

of EFL clubs and 25 Football Club Charities (EFLitC) independently assessed this season, as part of a rolling programme.

REVISED

Safeguarding 365 Standard for County FAs, English Schools and Independent Schools with assessments recommencing in 2025/26.

100%

NLS Steps 1-4 clubs met the safeguarding requirements of their licence.

122,302

DBS Checks processed by The FA.

86

Safeguarding Plans and Risk Assessments across camps, tournaments and events for England Women's, Men's and Para.

NEW SAFEGUARDING STANDARD BY WPLL

for BWSL & BWSL2 clubs introduced for 2025/26.

2. EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT

241,470

learners through England Football Learning safeguarding courses.

707,723

impressions of Play Safe survivor films.

THE PREMIER LEAGUE

internal coach development programmes have embedded contextual safeguarding, behaviour and trauma-informed approaches.

3. MANAGING CONCERNS

NEW LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

Policy for County FAs developed.

NEW CASE MANAGEMENT

system implemented.

OUR THREE PRIORITIES

Priority 1:
**GOVERNANCE
AND STANDARDS**

Priority 2:
**EDUCATION
AND EMPOWERMENT**

Priority 3:
**MANAGING
CONCERNS**



Priority 1:

GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS

Strategic Goal:

Ensuring we have strong leadership, effective governance oversight and robust standards driving continuous improvement.



1: Ensure governance oversight via Board and/or Committee monitoring and reporting across the game.

Action 1.1

FA Boards and Committees demonstrate accountability with regular engagement with Board Safeguarding Leads.

The FA's National Game Board, National Leagues Pyramid Board, Women's Football Board and Women's National League Board received updates for every meeting, and updates were provided when requested for The FA's Professional Game Board and the Professional Football Negotiating and Consultative Committee. Updates for The FA Board were made via the CEO report and there were various touchpoints with The FA Board lead and the Chair, inductions were completed with the WNL Board Safeguarding Champion and with all new Chairs and CEOs of County FAs.

The FA Group Audit Committee was updated in January 2025, with a focus on relevant risks and mitigations and the Risk Register was reviewed every month. The latter was also reviewed with The FA's Women's Board and National Game Board and the Senior Management Team. A Safeguarding Strategy 2024-28 session was held with the Senior Management Team in September 2024, with a session on case data and scenario training in February 2025. The FA Council was updated on the strategy and case data in February 2025 and FA Board refresher training is scheduled for 2025/26.

Action 1.2

FA Annual Reviews continue to be published, tracking KPIs, monitoring and demonstrating safeguarding culture and compliance.

Annual reviews were published in 2022, 2023 and 2024 and this is the annual review for 2025. This tracks our progress in supporting the game to comply with safeguarding requirements and drive ever-safer culture and practice.

Action 1.3

Policy and Designated Person contact details are available and proactively shared with members, and/or those participating in sessional football.

The safeguarding area of The FA's website is located using search engines and the terms 'safeguarding in football'. Contact details for The FA safeguarding team can be found in the following areas and are also proactively shared via FA safeguarding courses, messaging and campaigns:

- Section 1 of the safeguarding area via guidance notes 1.1: Football's Safeguarding Children Policy, which also highlights contact details for all the football stakeholders; and
- Section 2 via the landing page for reporting concerns.
- Section 3 of the safeguarding area signposts to the safeguarding contacts in the professional leagues and County FAs.

Clubs and sessional football providers are reminded that sharing these contact details with participants is an essential requirement and they sign a declaration to confirm that they ensure this happens.

Action 1.4

Club child, or person-centred policies and practice re: data management, overnight stays, travel, social media, digital and complaints processes are in line with safer working practice and signed off by the Club Committee.

FA guidance notes were refreshed on Appropriate Behaviours and Position of Trust; Travel, Trips and Tournament Advice and Permissions; Physical Contact and Young People: Guidance for Grassroots Football; Running Websites and Social Media Platforms; Digital Communications and Children (under-18s); and Photography and Filming Children.

Further work through the strategy will seek to ensure that this guidance is being put into practice by grassroots clubs, with the oversight of their committees.



2: Maintain, continuously improve and evolve Safeguarding Policies and Regulations.

Action 2.1

Policies, Regulations, Safer Recruitment and Safer Practice Guidance regularly reviewed, with reminders about professional boundaries and positions of trust consistently communicated.

The FA's Safeguarding Children Policy was reviewed with the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), and the Safeguarding Adults Policy was reviewed with the Ann Craft Trust. Both were also reviewed with our football stakeholders in 2024/25 and published in the 2025/26 season. The Safeguarding Regulations were reviewed with only minor typographical and cross-reference updates being made this season.

14 of the safeguarding guidance notes were reviewed for 2025/26, including: 1.7: Appropriate Behaviours and Positions of Trust, 2.1: How to Report Safeguarding Concerns, 2.4: Support and Guidance Contacts if You Receive a Disclosure, 5.4: Travel, Trips and Tournament Advice and Permissions, 5.6: Physical Contact and Young People: Guidance for Grassroots Football, 6.1: Running Websites and Social Media Platforms, 6.2: Digital Communications and Children (under-18s), 6.3: Staying Safe in the Digital World, 7.1: Know Your Rights in Football (16/17-year-olds), 7.5: How to ask an adult for help, 7.2: Including and Safeguarding Deaf and Disabled Children, 8.1: Questions you should ask, and 8.3: Photography and Filming Children.

Work was initiated by WPLL¹ to develop an updated safeguarding policy, alongside supportive safer working guidance and a 'raising concerns' guide for 2025/26.

The Professional Game Match Officials revised and refreshed their safeguarding policies and rolled-out training reminding everyone of professional boundaries and positions of trust and influence.

League Football Education refreshed its safeguarding policy, merging it with its strategy and rolled-out training to staff to ensure understanding and standardisation of reporting.

¹WPLL – The Women's Professional Leagues Limited – was rebranded as WSL Football in May 2025.



3: Continue to evolve Standards and ensure there is oversight and monitoring of compliance and culture.

Action 3.1

Safeguarding 365 Standard for County FAs, the ESFA and ISFA refreshed, and each organisation maintains and delivers continuous improvement.

Throughout the 2024/25 season, we've maintained continuous oversight of compliance against several measures across the grassroots game. These include DBS and training compliance for club and team officials in youth and adult open-age football. This oversight work is undertaken for The FA by a National Safeguarding Administration Shared Service, hosted by West Riding County FA with an FA project team reviewing this data on a regular basis.

Working alongside the NSPCC CPSU, the County FA Safeguarding Strategic Consultation Group and wider County FA stakeholders, the Safeguarding 365 Standard was thoroughly reviewed, resulting in a streamlining of requirements and additional emphasis around Listening to Children, new Club Visits to Open-Age Clubs, and locally-provided learning opportunities, including support for The FA's FLAG IT initiative to tackle bystanding. The FA National Game Board approved the new Standard in April 2025, and the manual was distributed to stakeholders in August 2025. To continue to demonstrate the Standard is consistently embedded as 'business as usual', all 50 County Associations, plus ESFA and ISFA, will undertake two independent assessments, at limited or no notice, between 2025-28.



Case Study

BANTAMS' ACADEMY DEMONSTRATES BEST PRACTICE

Affectionately known as the Bantams, Bradford City is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance and safeguarding within its Academy, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all players, staff and stakeholders.

Supporting its commitment, the club has embedded a robust safeguarding framework underpinned by clear policies, structured processes and continuous monitoring to demonstrate best practice.

“At the heart of this framework are weekly Academy safeguarding board meetings,” notes Paula Watson, Director of Operations, Lead Inclusion and Senior Safeguarding Officer.

“These sessions bring together key staff to review incident reports, monitor ongoing cases, and discuss the care and wellbeing of vulnerable individuals. The meetings also provide a platform to assess risk factors and ensure adherence to safeguarding policies. That’s in addition to making proactive decisions to strengthen the safeguarding environment.”

To embed safeguarding responsibilities across the Academy, all age group lead coaches have ‘Safeguarding Champion’ roles written into their job descriptions. This ensures accountability and a consistent safeguarding culture across all teams.

“The club also implements a structured reporting cycle, with monthly, quarterly, and six-monthly safeguarding updates presented to the Board,” Paula continues. **“These reports cover incident types, volumes, emerging trends, and areas requiring attention. In addition, an annual safeguarding review evaluates all incidents over the previous year, identifies lessons learned, and informs updates to policies and practices.”**

Ongoing improvement is further supported through regular CPD (Continuing Professional Development) sessions for coaches and staff, ensuring everyone is equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills to uphold safeguarding standards.

Collectively, all these measures demonstrate the Bantams’ proactive and transparent approach to governance and safeguarding. By embedding safeguarding into everyday operations, regularly reviewing policies, and fostering a culture of accountability, the club sets a strong example of best practice to ensure the welfare of its Academy players and staff.



By embedding clear policies, procedures and continuous monitoring, Bradford City can maintain a proactive and transparent approach to safeguarding at the League One club.



Action 3.2

Work with National League System and FA Women’s National League to ensure clubs continuously improve against Standards and where appropriate, align Standards.

All National League System Steps 1-4 clubs were offered 1:1 meetings and feedback on their club risk assessments and other submitted documentation to support consistent culture and practice. Six Club Welfare Officer courses were delivered for Steps 1-4 clubs, reflecting the new licence requirements and 100% of clubs attended the virtual Club Welfare Officer workshops, either in 2023/24 or 2024/25. 100% of clubs met the licence requirements by mid-April and the leagues were updated with this progress.

To support National League System Steps 5-6 clubs this season, tailored Club Welfare Officer workshops were delivered, which 81% of clubs attended. A further offer of training is being offered early in 2025/26, for the Clubs who haven't yet attended.

96% of the licence requirements were achieved by Women’s National League clubs, with quarterly drop-in sessions offered to all clubs to discuss any challenges or developments in relation to their safeguarding provision. Tailored Welfare Officer training was offered in July 2025, linked to the minimum standards and where appropriate, this mirrored the training in the NLS for consistency.

In the talent pathway, the safeguarding requirements for the Professional Game Academies and the Emerging Talent Centres were reviewed, with feedback from the Professional Game Academy Audit Company (independent auditors) to streamline and strengthen the requirements for the 2025/26 season.

Action 3.3

Premier League and EFL to continue to oversee continuous improvements by their clubs against their Standards.

Safeguarding is a standing Board agenda item for the Premier League and EFL and the Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards require club boards to provide effective leadership and governance over safeguarding arrangements.

40% of EFL clubs were independently assessed this season, as part of a rolling programme through which all clubs have been assessed by the current third-party provider, Barnardo’s.

The Premier League and EFL standards state the minimum staffing requirements, ensuring clubs meet this recommendation.

The EFL outlines minimum staffing requirements in line with the category of the Academy. A category one or two Academy must be dedicated full-time to the role of Designated Safeguarding Officer, and it will be their sole responsibility. A category three or four Academy must dedicate not less than 17.5 hours per week to the role of Designated Safeguarding Officer.

The Premier League Foundation reviewed the safeguarding requirements in their grant-making processes and made grants to over 100 football club charities and player foundations during the season.

EFL in the Community successfully initiated a rolling programme of Independent Safeguarding Reviews for 25 club charities per season.

Action 3.4

Women’s Professional Leagues Limited (WPLL)¹ works to align Safeguarding Standards for Barclays Women’s Super League and Barclays Women’s Championship² to Premier League and EFL Standards. Consult with players and club staff to evolve safer working frameworks.

A dedicated Safeguarding and Welfare Manager resource was appointed by WPLL and their Safeguarding Standards were aligned to the Premier League and EFL Safeguarding Standards and introduced for the 2025/26 season. The Standards apply to adult elite athletes, as well as children and adults at risk.

Action 3.5

The FA maintains the National Safeguarding Children Standards, and it continuously improves in line with the Adult Safeguarding Standards.

The FA provided evidence to the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit on the progress made in 2024/25, our plans for 2025/26, alongside wider evidence about our safeguarding practice, for their review.

In addition, The FA has worked operationally with the Ann Craft Trust and provided strategic updates in relation to the work undertaken in line with the Adult Safeguarding Standards. We are working with the Ann Craft Trust, towards a date to submit evidence against these standards.

¹WPLL = The Women's Professional Leagues Limited. It was rebranded as WSL Football in May 2025.
²In the year under review, Barclays Women's Championship was the correct title for this league. It has now been re-named Barclays Women's Super League 2.



Case Study

EMPOWERING FA WNL CLUBS TO BUILD EVER-SAFER CULTURES

Safeguarding is one of five key threads woven through the strategic priorities in the new FA WNL 'Where Our Game Grows' strategy, 2025-28.

As the curtain came down on the 2024/25 season, every one of the 72 clubs in The FA Women's National League (FA WNL¹) had met the 'Safe to Operate' standards set by The FA, with 96% achieving full compliance with the standards' safeguarding elements.

That's testimony to the support given to clubs to achieve the required standards – and to ongoing work within clubs, where the minimum standards are proving extremely useful, as explained by Matt Stock, Programme Manager at Loughborough Lightning: **"The FA WNL safeguarding standards have helped us to conduct an in-depth review of all areas, allowing us to improve our processes, from safer recruitment to reporting concerns. The help and guidance given has enabled us to build an environment that players and staff can feel confident in being supported and safe."**

Support to achieve the standards saw quarterly drop-in sessions facilitated by FA staff, delivering practical, accessible advice and guidance, alongside a bespoke FA Welfare Officer workshop delivered by County FA staff, addressing relevant topics in the women's game.

Further support came from The FA WNL Board, which approved funding for every club to access FA-sponsored FootballHER resources for the 2025/26 season. The resources cover a multi-module online course with relevant content for women in football e.g., menstrual cycle and performance, kit for women, nutrition, injury risk and resilience, pelvic health, fertility and pre-/post-natal guidance.

The support to build an ever-safer culture across the club network has been well received as Tim Hall, Swindon Town Club Secretary says: **"The FA WNL minimum standards, and particularly the safeguarding elements, have really helped us. Working closely to achieve the standards allowed for practices and policies to be refined across the club to cater for all aspects of academy, male and female teams."**

¹The six divisions of The FA WNL operate at the third and fourth tiers of the women's game, immediately below the newly re-named Women's Super League 2.



Clubs throughout The FA Women's National League structure have been supported to ensure safeguarding is a key component in the way they operate day-to-day.



Action 3.6

The FA, England Teams, Player Pathway and Events all have risk assessments and safeguarding plans in place, with safeguarding and wellbeing at their core.

A new Safeguarding Policy and accompanying Safer Working Practice Guidance was developed for England Women's Teams and Designated Safeguarding and Welfare Leads were recruited and deployed for Women's under-15s, under-16s, under-17s teams and under-19 teams, as well as for the under-17s' and under-19s' tournaments.

Safeguarding Plans and Risk Assessments were in place for 86 camps, tournaments and events in 2024/25 across the England Women's, Men's and Para landscapes and pathway. Additionally, for the 16 England on-the-road events, we deployed Child Matchday Support Officers and for the 42 events at Wembley Stadium, including concerts, we deployed Event Safeguarding Advisors.

A visit was undertaken to the North Top Talent Event in February, resulting in amendments to the processes for player check-out at these sessions. These events, and a visit to the Professional Game Academy under-16s' and under-21s' Finals in March, led to recommendations on player supervision protocols to enhance player safety at events.

See case study on pages 22-23.

Action 3.7

Continue to support third-party hirers to meet the safeguarding requirements at our venues.

Over 360 non-FA organisations held events at St. George's Park and provided safeguarding policies and risk assessments as part of the booking process for activities involving children or adults at risk.

Action 3.8

Continue to ensure that safeguarding is embedded into the planning and delivery of major events and tournaments.

The EE Disability FA Cup returned to St. George's Park in a newly-expanded format, with six Cup Finals and an exhibition of frame football. The event included player escorts and was underpinned by a safeguarding risk assessment and plan.

The FA safeguarding team inputted to The FA events team's risk assessment and plan and supported their brilliant execution of the Lionesses UEFA Women's Euros victory parade on The Mall, London in July 2025.

The team is also supporting the planning and preparation for the Men's UEFA Euro 2028, which will be co-hosted by England, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales in June/July 2028. This will draw upon the experience gained from hosting previous tournaments and finals in 2021 and 2022. Work is ongoing, linked to UEFA and the UK Government.

Action 3.9

The FA develops a referee management system, enabling the tracking of referee appointments, and therefore oversight of unregistered referees.

The requirement for a referee management system is made in the Refereeing, Safeguarding and Grassroots strategies. Work is ongoing to bring this into fruition during the lifecycle of these strategies.

Action 3.10

The FA continues to work with County FAs to encourage external coaching providers (private providers) to demonstrate safer working practice.

The FA is continuing to develop a national proposition for providers to gain an approved status, if they meet minimum operating standards.

4: Continue to support, engage with and empower those with lived experience.

Action 4.1

Continue to deliver a framework of support for survivors and engagement with those with lived experience of abuse in the game.

A further 49 people have accessed therapeutic support via our provider Sporting Chance this season, including six new referrals. In total 305 people have accessed support since 2017, including 43 family members.

£60,073 was awarded by The FA Benevolent Fund to survivors of abuse in football in 2024/25 and since 2019, the fund has received 222 applications, with £618,728 awarded to support survivors. Following suggestions from the PFA Advocate, new processes were implemented for supporting individuals with specialist benefits advice and, where appropriate, case-by-case basis assessments for PTSD.

A further 35 people have been supported this season through the PFA Survivor Support Advocacy Service, 22 of whom were survivors of abuse in football and 13 were PFA members, who had experienced childhood sexual abuse outside a football setting. In total, 161 people have been supported since 2019, 129 survivors and 32 PFA members.

The FA's Survivor Support and Safeguarding Group (FASSSAG) met five times during the season, including a visit to Everton FC to learn about the day-to-day work across the club, academy, matchday and community operations. An additional member with lived experience was onboarded and four of the group inputted to delivery of The FA Safeguarding Conference for County FAs in November 2024. One delivered a keynote at the Nottinghamshire Police Conference in March 2025, and the FIFA Guardians training at St. George's Park in May 2025, and two were filmed with key contributions to the new 'Safeguarding at The FA' staff module, launching early in 2025/26.

5: Collaborate with stakeholders in football, sport, and the safeguarding sector to lobby Government and other agencies for change.

Action 5.1

The FA collaborates with other sports, and more widely lobbies effectively for positive safeguarding change.

The FA has continued to work alongside other sports to share ideas and collaborate on any lobbying activities, this has included the Rugby Football Union, the Cricket Regulator, the Lawn Tennis Association and British Gymnastics. Similarly, we've worked as part of a Five Nations Safeguarding Forum with the FA of Wales, the Scottish FA, the Irish FA and the FA of Ireland. Our collaboration work extends to the international bodies of UEFA and FIFA, as well as National Policing, the NSPCC, the Ann Craft Trust and the Safe Sport project, which published this report in June <https://www.ukssport.gov.uk/news/2025/06/24/the-five-uk-sports-councils-publish-the-safe-sport-report>

Case Study

SAFEGUARDING'S AT THE HEART OF EVERY WEMBLEY EVENT

Established six years ago, the role of Event Safeguarding Advisors (ESAs) at Wembley Stadium is now an integral part of every major event day at our national stadium.

The role sees ESAs respond to incidents within the stadium, working collaboratively with the wider Wembley team to actively protect children, young people and adults at risk in line with FA and Wembley Safeguarding and Event Policies. The team carrying out this sensitive work are all highly-experienced and trained safeguarding professionals, recruited from statutory agency backgrounds.

Among the ESA team is Rory Niblock, who comments: **“I’m privileged to have represented The FA at the national stadium for six successful seasons. In that time, I’ve seen the role grow from concept to the core part it plays today at some incredible events.”**

The role’s importance is echoed by fellow ESA Claire Bassett: **“Over the past six years, the role has grown significantly. It’s been an honour to help shape and develop it from inception – and to build strong working relationships along the way. Our presence contributes directly to the delivery of safety, security, and service for everyone, everywhere at every event.”**

Reporting to the Stadium Safety Officer on event days, the team was expanded for the 2024/25 season, reflecting the more than 60 events the stadium now hosts in an ever-changing schedule. These events saw the ESAs respond to 300+ safeguarding-related incidents during the season – each one drawing on the team’s expertise and professionalism.

On a wider level, the ESAs educate and empower full-time and casual staff to recognise, respond to and report safeguarding incidents. In the process, safeguarding standards are maintained, continuous professional development is provided and the message is constant and clear: ‘safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility’.



Priority 2:

EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Strategic Goal:

Educating to empower and help create an ever-safer culture.



1: Drive positive safeguarding behaviours on and offline and champion the voices of children, young people and adults at risk.

Action 1.1

Deliver co-ordinated approach to empowering children and adults at risk voices in football.

We continue to collaborate with colleagues internally, as well as partners, including the Premier League, EFL, WPLL¹ and UNICEF, to create further opportunities to embed the practice of listening to children across all areas of our organisation.

All but one County FA met The FA's Code of Governance requirements and have established a Youth Council or similar mechanism to embed child voice. The new Safeguarding 365 Standard contains refreshed guidance on child rights and empowering children's voices.

Work was undertaken with UNICEF, the University of Chichester and The FA Data and Insights team, to agree the questions and a process for us to collect national data on children and young people's perceptions on how much their voices are enabled and are involved in decision-making in their football settings.

The theme for Play Safe 2025 was agreed as 'empowering the voices of children and young people', and collaborative work is ongoing with FA colleagues leading the FutureFit programme to change the format of youth football and underpin this significant shift with the principles and resources to bring children's rights to life. This includes the decisions children could be involved in at their club and the development of a toolkit to support clubs in developing environments where young people have an active voice through the Play Safe campaign.

¹WPLL = The Women's Professional Leagues Limited. It was rebranded as WSL Football in May 2025.

Play Safe 2024 highlights:



KNOW YOUR ROLE
in safeguarding concept and resources developed for the grassroots game.

In response to feedback from Play Safe 2023, banners provided greater visibility and England Football page content had

30K VIEWS
leading to the Play Safe brand being more recognised.

GREAT ENGAGEMENT
from the professional game with social media activity and activations including short inspiring films.

CLUB WELFARE OFFICERS

in grassroots clubs who signed up to support the campaign, received a thank you letter and a silver Play Safe pin badge which were well received.

Strong impact generated by survivor films with an overall total of
707,723 IMPRESSIONS and
13,371 ENGAGEMENTS
with this content.





Case Study

PLAY SAFE
ONCE MORE
UNITES
THE GAME

“Everyone has a role to play in preventing abuse and we’re gratified to see The FA once more promoting safeguarding awareness in football through Play Safe. It’s also great to see Play Safe is again supported by every level of football in England.”

Peter Wanless, CEO, NSPCC (at the time of the Play Safe weekend)

PLAY SAFE – The FA-led year-round safeguarding awareness campaign – again saw football at every level unite around one core message over the weekend of 28/29 September 2024.

That message was ‘Know your role’ and the NSPCC-endorsed campaign highlighted the safeguarding role that everyone can play – coaches, players, parents/carers, spectators or volunteers – to keep children and young people safe, no matter what the football setting.

Via The FA’s provision of digital assets, bespoke films and physical items such as 10,000 pin badges and 48,000 captain’s armbands, the message was amplified by clubs across the Premier League, EFL, Barclays Women’s Super League, Barclays Women’s Championship, National League and throughout the grassroots game, including County FAs.

“Of the many examples of engagement at the professional level, Stoke City produced their own club safeguarding awareness film,” notes Sue Ravenlaw, FA Head of Safeguarding “It included pieces to camera from influential key people, such as the club’s Head Coach, Women’s Performance Director, senior players, Matchday Safeguarding Officers and the Head of Safeguarding.”

Making **PLAY SAFE** club-specific is encouraged, and Premier League Everton took the opportunity to interview two of their up-and-coming female players (see case study on page 38). The duo shared their views on safeguarding, social media issues and the club support they receive when adjusting to playing in the first team.

The FA’s own films comprised unflinching interviews with three survivors, exemplifying the ongoing and crucial support of The FA Survivor Support Advisory Group (FASSSAG) who champion the importance of safeguarding culture and practice across the game.



Clubs at every level of the game in England brought the Play Safe branding to life.



DISCOVER HOW OTHER PEOPLE ARE PLAYING THEIR PART TO KEEP THE GAME SAFE

1:05 video

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL
Know your role as a player

1 Jan 2024

1:27 video

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL
Know your role as a spectator

1 Jan 2024

1:58 video

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL
Know your role as a parent/carer

1 Jan 2024

0:39 video

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL
Know your role as a referee

1 Jan 2024

A bespoke ‘Know Your Role’ website was pivotal to communicate Play Safe 2024’s core message.

Action 1.2

Educate re: acceptable behaviours, banter, contextual safeguarding, grooming behaviours.

Guidance notes were refreshed for 2025/26, including: 1.7: Appropriate Behaviours and Positions of Trust; 2.1: How to Report Safeguarding Concerns; 2.4: Support and Guidance Contacts if you Receive a Disclosure; 5.6: Physical Contact and Young People: Guidance for Grassroots Football; 6.1: Running Websites and Social Media Platforms; 6.2: Digital Communications and Children (under-18s); 6.3: Staying Safe in the Digital World; 7.1: Know Your Rights in Football (16/17-year-olds); 7.5: How to ask an adult for help; 7.2: Including and Safeguarding Deaf and Disabled Children; 8.1: Questions you should ask; and 8.3: Photography and Filming Children.

Guidance was also developed for the new coach developers' handbook for 2025/26.

Action 1.3

Collaborate to support and safeguard under-18 referees and referees who may be adults at risk.

Various County FA-led activations were implemented in 2024/25 using different-coloured armbands or kit, to identify when there was a youth referee (under-18s) officiating. Building on this in collaboration with County FAs, for 2025/26 all under-18 referees nationally will have the option to wear a yellow 'U18' armband, to signify they are not an adult. This is a visual notice to players, coaches, and spectators to treat them with an extra level of respect and patience. These armbands will be distributed to all under-18 referees via their respective County FAs, and while not mandatory, we are encouraging those eligible to wear them. Anyone who abuses a referee who is also a young person will find that the offence is seen as aggravated by this fact and therefore if found proven, the sanction will invariably be more significant.



Action 1.4

Support open-age clubs with their approaches to safeguarding and player welfare, including under-18s moving into adult football.

England Football Learning's Player Welfare Course is mandatory for all Club Welfare Officers, Adult Team Officials and their respective assistants. The course covers a range of topics, including how a positive culture in physical and digital environments can support player welfare. Safeguarding for adults and under-18s, recognising different kinds of safeguarding and welfare issues that can arise in the game, and how to report and signpost these appropriately.

Building on the safeguarding declarations for all affiliated leagues and clubs, tailored declarations were produced for all categories classified for Competition Sanction e.g. Education – HE/FE, Grassroots Cup Competitions, Grassroots Leagues, National League System Steps 1-6 etc. These clearly set out the expectations for safeguarding and player welfare across these settings.

A review of sessional football was also undertaken to ensure consistent alignment of safeguards and identify any requirement for enhancements for 2025/26.



Case Study

BRINGING SAFEGUARDING TOPICS TO VOLUNTEERS, VIRTUALLY

Recognising the lifestyle constraints of volunteers, Manchester FA has launched an online webinar series covering a comprehensive range of safeguarding-related topics.

Scott Dean, Manchester FA's Designated Safeguarding Officer says: **“The series offers a flexible platform that allows us to deliver topical content from industry experts. This boosts engagement and we get more people attending in the ‘virtual’ room.”**

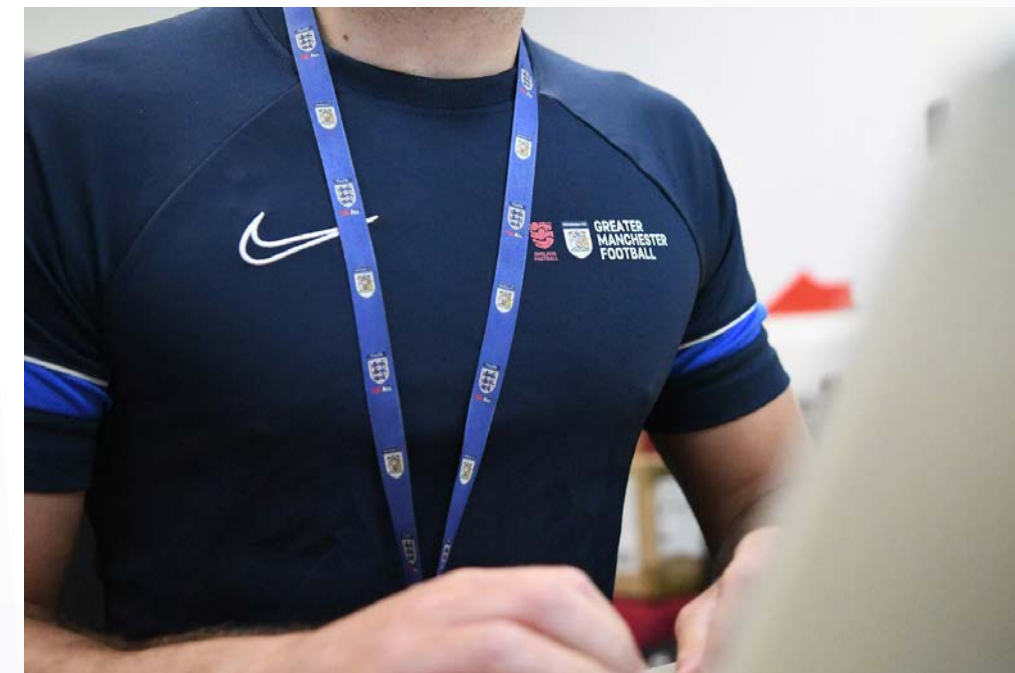
The credibility and expertise of speakers adds value, making the sessions both informative and practical. The series has also created space for dialogue, allowing volunteers' voices to be heard directly. **“For example,”** says Scott, **“Feedback has highlighted a clear preference for shorter, focused online sessions over traditional face-to-face formats.”**

The appetite for the programme has grown, with volunteers now requesting sessions on topics specific to their roles and challenges. In response, sessions have been delivered by the wider County FA team, drawing on their areas of expertise.

“These webinars are exactly the kind of flexible, expert-led support our volunteers need,” says Scott. **“They empower people to stay informed, confident, and focused on creating safe environments across football.”**

To date, topics covered in the webinars have included sessions around managing concussions, treating injuries in cold and warm weather, injury prevention and ACL recovery in female players and behaviour de-escalation tactics.

In welcoming the series, Stephen McDonough, League Venue Co-ordinator of the East Manchester Junior Football League notes: **“The series has been a fantastic and valuable tool. It’s given us the opportunity to share the successes and challenges we’ve faced across different areas of the grassroots game, while opening up insightful dialogue with others with whom I might otherwise not have had the chance to connect.”**



Manchester FA's series of online safeguarding-related webinars has boosted engagement in the topic.

2: Empower and better equip participants to safeguard and support welfare.

Action 2.1

Empower participants to recognise and overcome bystander behaviours, break the silence and raise and report concerns.

Working with an expert third-party creative agency and a third party with significant expertise in change management programmes to tackle bystandering, a creative concept and draft learning module was created. This went through a concept check and challenge with County FA DSOs who also helped us to work up draft learning scenarios. Delivery and content were tested via in-person and online workshops in February and March 2025. Rolling 'train-the-trainer' dates began in July 2025 with the intention of training staff in all County FAs to deliver the workshop in 2025/26. Work is ongoing to finalise the landing page that signposts the different routes for reporting concerns and to finalise the marcomms campaign.

Action 2.2

Promote resources to support mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

The FA's mental health guide for coaches and managers in the adult game, is available [here](#) and was developed with the charity Mind and other advisors. It helps coaches and managers spot the signs of mental health problems and give them the confidence to support and signpost to specialist help where appropriate. England Football Learning's Welfare Directory also signposts coaches to external information links in relation to supporting welfare matters with under-18 and adult players.

Action 2.3

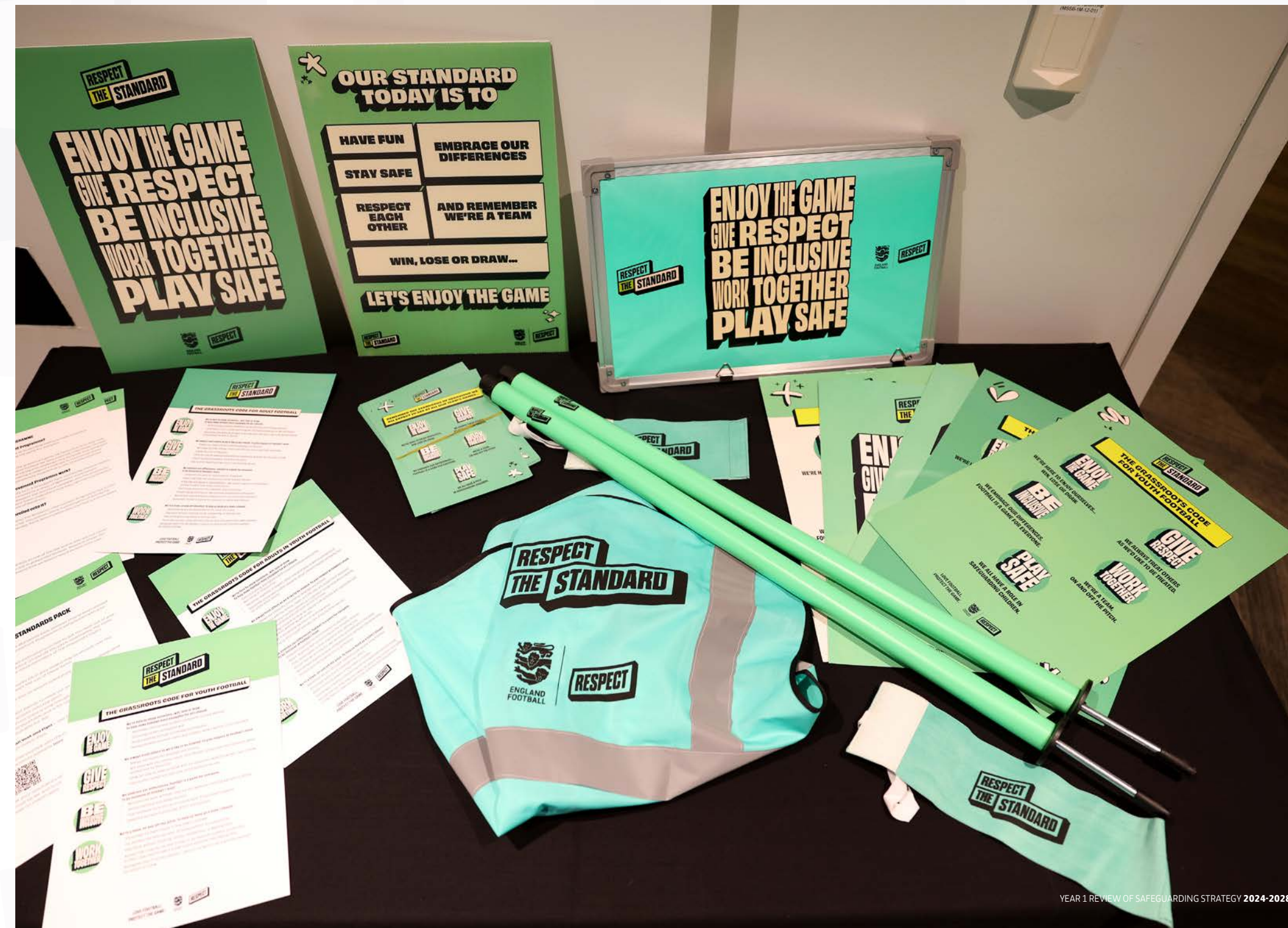
Educate parents/carers on their safeguarding responsibilities and the expected standards and behaviours to which they should adhere.

By the end of the 2024/25 season, 35,000 had completed England Football Learning's Safeguarding Awareness for Parents/Carers course, with a further campaign to promote the course planned for early 2025/26 linked to Play Safe 2025.

In line with the 'Love Football, Protect the Game' campaign, The FA Grassroots team reviewed the Respect Standards and Grassroots Codes of Conduct, designed to drive positive standards of behaviour. These were launched across all grassroots clubs, setting a clear unified baseline for behaviours in the game. This helped reset the conversation on behaviour, including with parents and carers on the sidelines. We are embedding these across the grassroots game, with pitchside assets available to remind parents of the expected behaviour. Respect barriers are also available, helping prevent parents from encroaching on the pitch, which can be difficult for younger referees to manage.

Another national 'Silent Support Weekend' was run, with record numbers participating. Data shows that this resulted in an improvement in touchline behaviour for up to four weeks. Two of these weekends will be embedded to the season from 2025/26 onwards and our research shows us that two 'Silent Support Weekends' will be well supported by the game.

A new Behaviour Improvement Plan was introduced for the worst-behaving teams, which links to new penalty-point accumulations. These have been implemented and result in teams being subject to a behaviour improvement plan overseen by their County FA, or ultimately potentially facing having their affiliation removed. This work is supported by a Behaviour Hub as a central resource and learning platform.



Action 2.4

Continue to educate elite first-team staff and players on safeguarding – Premier League, EFL, Barclays Women’s Super League, Barclays Women’s Championship¹ and England – and provide age-specific content for all players.

The Premier League and EFL continue to deliver regular national training and awareness events, as well as training to clubs through individual support plans.

EFL clubs continued to deliver a rolling comprehensive programme of training including DSO Level 3 qualification, safer recruitment, harmful sexual behaviour, contextual safeguarding, online harms, trauma-informed practice, matchday safeguarding, gang and knife crime, managing allegations training and adults at risk training.

A female focused, athlete-led, trauma-informed service was commissioned by WPLL² to provide an independent helpline for all players. Training in ‘creating healthy football environments’ was co-developed with this service to address knowledge gaps, under-reporting and to bring policy and guidance to life for first-team players and staff through 2025/26.

Briefings were delivered to staff and players on England Women’s Development Camps.

Action 2.5

Educate and signpost participants to information to keep them safe online and to support with managing societal issues that impact football e.g. knife crime, County Lines³ etc.

In October 2024, we contributed to a safeguarding podcast, run by a member of the NSPCC’s young people’s board for change, building a collective culture of safety in sport and physical activity, as part of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit’s ‘Keeping your Child Safe in Sport’ week.

We also updated the following guidance notes: 6.1: Running Websites and Social Media Platforms; 6.2: Digital Communications and Children (under-18s); 6.3: Staying Safe in the Digital World.

Work continues to develop further resources during 25-28.

¹The Barclays Women’s Championship was the correct title of this league during the year under review. It has since been re-named the Barclays Women’s Super League 2.

²WPLL – The Women’s Professional Leagues Limited – was rebranded as WSL Football in May 2025.

³County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs.

3: Deliver our mandatory course programme.

Action 3.1

Continue to deliver mandatory qualification programme for those in specified roles, updating in line with legislation, policy and guidance.

The priority during 2024/25 was to review and adapt the current portfolio and check and challenge the content, in advance of courses being moved onto the new learner management system in 2025/26. This work will continue to the end of 2025.

The number of learners through safeguarding courses in 2024/25 was 241,470, with most courses free to learners.

Action 3.2

Review and simplify mandatory qualification programme, seeking to minimise duplication for those with multiple roles in football.

This work is scheduled to commence in the latter part of the strategic cycle as the priority this season, has been to transfer current learning modules to a new learning management platform.

Action 3.3

Embed and amplify Government messaging re: any new ‘Mandatory Reporting Duty’.

New legislation is due to be introduced via the Crime and Policing Bill, which is working its way through the Parliamentary system. We will adapt our Policies and Regulations accordingly, once we are fully clear on the implications for sport settings.

4: Deliver recommended and targeted resources and continuous professional development (CPD).

Action 4.1

Promote the time-saving benefits of digital identity and roll-out of DBS Checks 2025/26.

During this season The FA worked with our DBS Check providers to integrate the DBS application process within our England Football portals, which was launched in June, as part of the affiliation process for 2025/26. This included the introduction of significant time-saving digital identification technology, which negates the need for staff and volunteers to organise meetings and check individuals’ identity documentation. 122,302 checks were completed during the 2024/25 season, with 25,450 undertaken using the new system from June to the end of July. As well as volunteer time saved, we have heard comments like “easiest it’s ever been” from clubs. A small percentage of people did not have a smooth experience with this new process, and the technology teams at The FA and our third-party provider First Advantage are continuing to work hard to ensure everyone has a smooth customer experience.

Action 4.2

Deliver targeted and bite-size content on topics e.g. safer recruitment, disordered eating.

A ‘Safer Recruitment’ CPD package was developed centrally and shared with County FA DSO networks for them to deliver to grassroots Club Welfare Officers from March 2025 onwards.

A CPD package on Lower-Level Concerns for grassroots coaches is in progress and continue to build on these resources and monitor the impact of the CPD delivered..

Action 4.3

Collaborate with County FAs and support them to deliver a more nationally co-ordinated CPD offer for Club Welfare Officers, coaches etc.

Work is ongoing to drive this offer from 2026-28.

Action 4.4

Collaborate with stakeholders to share good practice, and coordinate CPD opportunities for designated persons.

Internally, a new staff ‘Safeguarding at The FA’ module was developed, which will be launched early in 2025/26. CPD was run with The FA Women’s Technical senior and extended leadership teams, the casual safeguarding workforce, the Men’s Player Education Officers working with teams, our Para team staff and the Women’s England Talent Pathway team.

The County FA training calendar was published with a full season of events, and County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) peer collaboration and learning sessions were delivered monthly to facilitate the sharing of practice across County FA DSOs. An extensive training programme rolled-out to all relevant County FA staff in the year under review.

A conference for County FAs and National Schools FAs was successfully delivered in November 2024, with excellent feedback regarding the content and format. See the case study on pages 46-49.

The League Managers Association launched a four-module safeguarding short course in partnership with the Premier League and delivered it to one cohort of 20 coaches. They also delivered a ‘retain and release’ webinar for their members, in conjunction with the EFL.

The Professional Game Match Officials delivered refresher safeguarding training for all their match officials with excellent take-up.

The Professional Footballers’ Association (PFA) appointed a new Director of Wellbeing with safeguarding as part of their brief. The intention is to review and drive a new safeguarding strategy for the PFA during 2025/26, which will include safeguarding training for all staff.



Case Study

AN EVER- PRESENT COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING

Everton's impressive commitment to safeguarding is ever-present throughout the year, with the Play Safe Weekend providing a spotlight on the ongoing work across the club.

“We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for everyone,” explains Paul Cuthbert, Everton FC's Head of Safeguarding. **“For example, over the past two seasons we have expanded our matchday stewarding team to 20 experienced staff dedicated to ensuring the wellbeing of players, staff and supporters. This matchday model has been rolled out at every men's senior fixture at our new stadium and all our women's senior fixtures”**

In addition, the club continues to host quarterly safeguarding committee meetings, attended by representatives of the club, Academy, Everton Women and Professional Game Academy (PGA). This provides a forum to share best practice, review processes and drive continuous improvement.

Within the wider club – and to highlight safeguarding awareness in women's football – Everton Women's and PGA took the opportunity of The FA's annual Play Safe weekend to shine a light on how safeguarding is embedded across the organisation. Spearheading all the Play Safe endeavours was Everton Women's Safeguarding Manager Gary Featherstone. In the lead-up to the weekend, Play Safe was included as a standing agenda item in all departmental operational meetings to ensure consistent awareness and understanding across teams. Communication outlining the purpose of Play Safe and the club's planned activity was sent to all parents/carers, players and staff prior to the weekend. Departmental safeguarding training also explored the Sheldon Review and explained the origins of the Play Safe initiative, reinforcing the importance of recognising and reporting concerns. As part of visible matchday support, the Head Coach wore a Play Safe badge during his pre-game press conference, and this was mirrored by the wider staffing team. The Club captain, Megan Finnigan, representing the playing squad, wore the Play Safe armband.

The Club's external communications supported the initiative through social media posts published before and throughout the weekend. This included a dedicated video released on the Everton Women channels, in which two younger players discussed what safeguarding means to them alongside presenter Sarah Halpin. The video formed part of the wider campaign to elevate young voices and highlight safeguarding from a player perspective.

Additionally, the club's Head of Safeguarding, Paul Cuthbert, contributed a Play Safe safeguarding article that featured in both the men's and women's matchday programmes across the weekend, further underlining the importance the organisation places on safeguarding.

It all adds up to embedding an ever-safer culture throughout the Everton family, 365 days a year.



Premier League Everton FC provided an excellent example of a club embracing the Play Safe weekend to showcase their safeguarding practices.

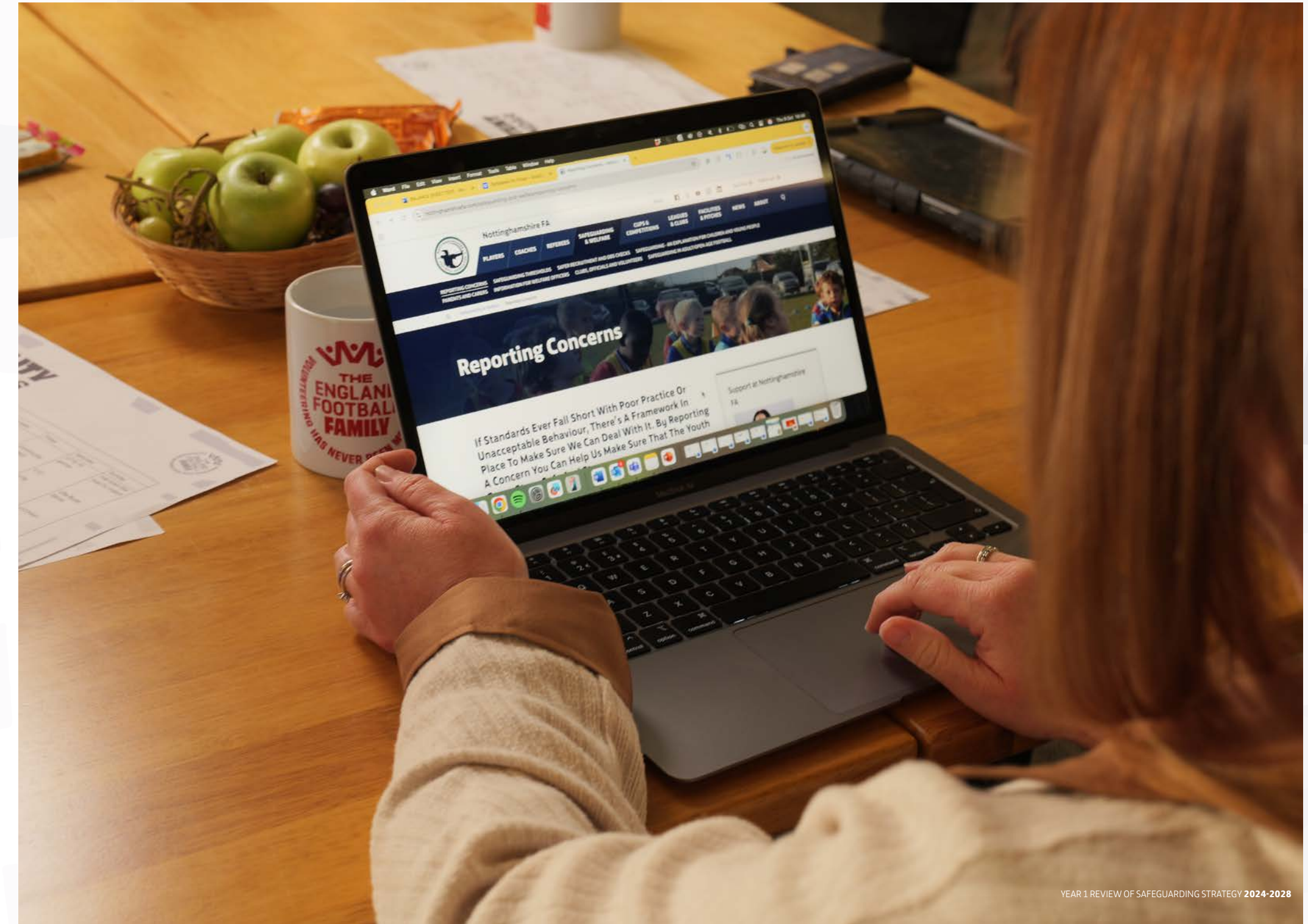


Priority 3:

MANAGING CONCERNS

Strategic Goal:

Enabling reporting and handling safeguarding referrals in a safe and effective way.



1: Continue to raise awareness of ways of reporting.

Action 1.1

Ensure that reporting content remains clear and impactful, as part of the review outlined in Education and Empowerment Intervention 3.2.

There was a significant increase in safeguarding referrals to The FA Safeguarding Case Management Team this season, leading to an initial assessment within 48 working hours and an increase in cases opened for a full risk assessment by the team. This is a positive indicator of increased understanding of the reporting pathways. The overall trend of referrals increasing led to five more staff being recruited to the team in 2024/25.

Allegations continue to be managed in line with The FA Safeguarding Children Regulations and The FA Safeguarding Adult at Risk Regulations in conjunction with statutory agencies.

The guidance note 2.1: How To Report Safeguarding Concerns, was also refreshed and will be uploaded on The FA website early in 2025/26.

Action 1.2

Collaborate with all sectors to raise awareness and understanding of any new 'Mandatory Reporting Duty' in society.

Currently, there is no general statutory obligation for individuals in England to report child abuse. However, in January 2025, the Home Secretary announced the government would "make it mandatory to report abuse" through measures in the Crime and Policing Bill, which is working its way through the Parliamentary system. This includes making it "an offence, with professional and criminal sanctions", in relation to failures to report child sexual abuse. We will adapt our Policies and Regulations accordingly, once we are fully clear on the implications for sport settings.

Action 1.3

Develop additional accessible content to signpost ways of reporting for participants e.g. linked to Education and Empowerment Intervention 2.1.

Over the 2025-28 period of The FA's Safeguarding Strategy, the FLAG IT strategic initiative should enable timely interventions to support victims and increase the likelihood of more concerns about general poor behaviours, discrimination and concerns about abuse and misconduct being reported.

In 2025/26, we will build on the guidance in 2.1: How To Report Safeguarding Concerns, to extend its reach.

Action 1.4

Widely promote the awareness course for parents and carers outlined in Education and Empowerment Intervention 2.3, which covers how to report concerns.

As reported in 2.3 of Priority 2, by the end of the 2024/25 season, 35,000 had completed England Football Learning's 'Safeguarding Awareness for Parents/Carers' course, with a further campaign to promote the course planned for early 2025/26 aligned to Play Safe.



England Football Learning

GET STARTED COURSES SESSIONS ARTICLES & RESOURCES ONGOING LEARNING NEWS

COURSE

Safeguarding Awareness for Parents & Carers

Helping parents make an informed choice about the football setting they enrol their children in.

PLAY SAFE

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course type: Online	Minimum age: 16	Duration: 1 hour	Price: Free
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GET STARTED

About the course

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – but are you clear about the vital role you can play?

Safeguarding is about creating safe environments and preventing children from experiencing harm or abuse. Put simply, safeguarding refers to measures we take to protect our children – and keep them safe and well. Whether that's your kids, the opposing players or even the ref, every young person has the right to enjoy football.





Case Study

MANDATORY SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS IN PLACE FOR NLS CLUBS

Continuous improvements are helping to lay firm safeguarding foundations in the NLS Steps 1-4 Leagues and Clubs.

Building on the last 24 months' solid foundations, the 2025/26 season sees safeguarding requirements embedded in The FA National League System¹ (NLS) Step 1-4 Club Licensing requirements. It means clubs at this level must meet enhanced safeguarding conditions to play in their respective league.

To get to this point, The FA and the National League have worked closely with clubs, supporting them to ensure that 100% achieved the requirements in 2024/25. In doing so:

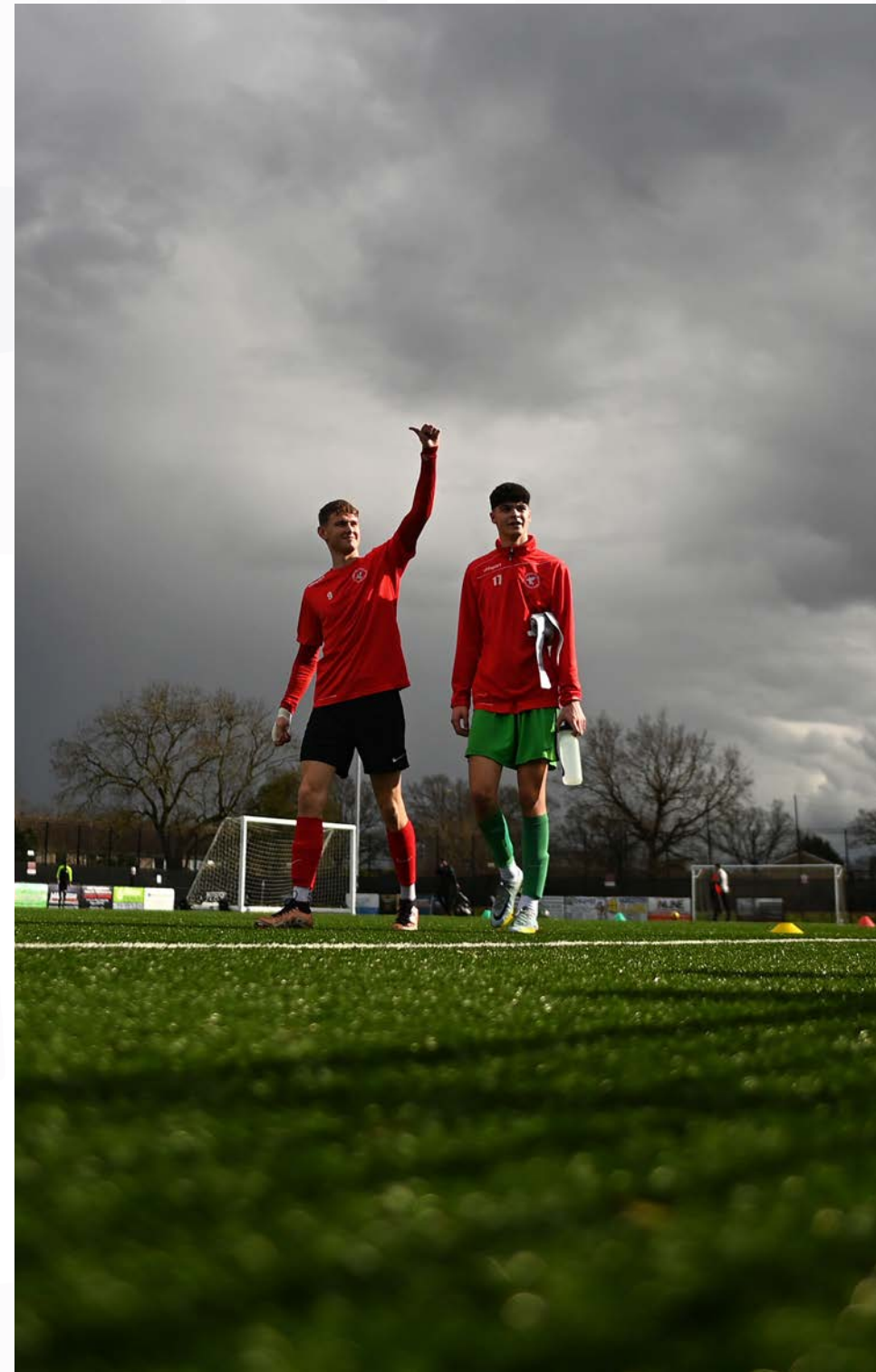
- Each club has appointed a Board Safeguarding Champion, based on the role profile provided. The appointment means safeguarding is a constant part of a club Board's remit.
- All 325 clubs have their safeguarding policy visible on their websites, ensuring this important information is easy to find and use.
- Every club has reflected on its safeguarding practice, identified actions to create safer spaces and reduce the potential risk of harm through a comprehensive risk assessment process.

"Above all, we value and appreciate the individuals in clubs, many of whom are volunteers, for getting us all to this point – and thank them for their continued eagerness to make their safeguarding systems and processes ever safer," says Martyn Cannon, National League Designated Safeguarding Officer.

"The commitment to safeguarding shown by clubs and their officials has been inspirational. It is great to see how clubs across the NLS 1-4 Leagues are embracing this important work."

Below Steps 1-4, safeguarding capacity has also been built via the delivery of 51 bespoke workshops to nearly 900 club and league officials across the 15 NLS Step 5-6 leagues.

¹The National League System covers the leagues at steps 1-6 of the men's football pyramid, i.e. immediately below the full professional leagues (Premier League and EFL). In the year under review, our work has predominantly focused on Steps 1-4.



Clubs throughout Steps 1-4 of The FA National League System clubs must now meet enhanced safeguarding conditions as part of Club Licensing requirements.

2: Provide targeted and consistent guidance and support re: managing Lower-Level Concerns (LLCs).

Action 2.1

Widely promote Lower-Level Concern Policy, support learning and guidance and consider measures that can be implemented for cases where there are more than three lower-level concerns.

In 2024/25 we commissioned the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit to engage grassroots stakeholders and develop a Lower-Level Concerns Policy for County FAs and grassroots clubs.

This Policy will be shared with County FAs in 2025/26 to drive greater consistency in their management of lower-level concerns. The focus will then be on grassroots clubs, professional and semi-professional leagues and clubs for the remainder of this strategy cycle.

Action 2.2

Explore education, and sanctions (for clubs and individuals) where non-compliance occurs or persists.

This work is scheduled to commence in 2025-28.

Action 2.3

Review County FA lower-level concern, safeguarding and discipline processes, to remove duplication and increase efficiency. Review discipline processes to ensure they are child-centred and child - and adult-at-risk friendly.

Our processes have been under ongoing review by the safeguarding and discipline teams as part of the Safeguarding 365 review. To enhance accessibility, The FA's Grassroots Discipline Team released additional guidance in relation to reasonable adjustments within their processes. Bi-monthly meetings between the safeguarding and discipline teams continue to include a focus on child-centred and child and adult-at-risk-friendly working. This work will also form part of a wider review in 2025/26.

3: Support designated persons to respond to and manage concerns and referrals effectively.

Action 3.1

Continue to provide training and consultation on thresholds and how to manage concerns that arise in football, or that The FA becomes aware of through football.

Training to guide stakeholders on the thresholds for referrals that must be referred to The FA has been delivered to representatives from the Premier League, Premier League Foundation and Football Club charities, EFL Championship and League One, EFL in the Community and Football Club charities, Barclays Women's Super League and Barclays Women's Championship¹ Clubs, National League System Steps 1 and 2. Threshold training is delivered to all new County FA DSOs, Deputy DSOs, Senior Safeguarding Leads (SSLs) and Deputy SSLs every quarter, with an additional policy session delivered for County FA Board Champions to better equip them in their role.

Action 3.2

Engage designated persons with the review of TheFA.com content and provide flexible content in formats they can readily use.

Consultation was undertaken with County FA DSOs to identify the guidance notes they most frequently use, or are asked about. Alongside this, we used wider insight to prioritise 14 guidance notes for review this season, these are detailed in Priority 1, section 2.1.

Work continues on reviewing content to provide it in user-friendly formats.

Action 3.2

Collaborate with statutory agencies to optimise information-sharing and partnership working.

The FA Statutory Agencies Guide was updated for 2024/25, and we continue to feed into cross-sport initiatives in collaboration with NSPCC CPSU to address common challenges and improve partnership working in relation to information-sharing.

¹The Barclays Women's Championship was the correct title of this league during the year under year. It has since been re-named the Barclays Women's Super League 2.

4: Deliver robust FA investigations, systems, data and Quality Assurance.

Action 4.1

Embed consistent use of new Case Management System. Review and implement learning re: referrals relating to child-on-child, adult-on-child and adult-on-adult cases.

Underpinned by training and guidance, the new Case Management System was launched internally to the The FA Safeguarding Case Management Team and externally to County FAs.

Marcella Leonard MBE delivered an excellent session at the annual safeguarding conference for County FAs, ESFA and ISFA, covering child-on-child abuse and subsequently delivered further in-depth training for The FA's Safeguarding Case Management Team.

The conference also included a focus on national police and FA insight into child-on-child abuse in society and examples of how some of this behaviour has spilled over into football settings.

See case study on pages 46-49.

Action 4.2

Utilise learning from Quality Assurance measures, data, audit and case reviews to evolve policy and practice.

The FA Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework has embedded a cycle of monitoring, continuous reflection and learning across the safeguarding Case Management Team's case work, based on the principle that there is always room for development. Key themes from quality assurance activity this season include:

- An increase in consultations, referrals and cases opened by The FA Safeguarding Case Management Team, demonstrating greater awareness of safeguarding reporting channels and safeguarding responsibilities in football.
- The most prevalent category of concern referred to The FA is sexual abuse.
- Coaches are the most prevalent role referred to The FA.
- There has been an increase in the number of referrals, where the individual referred is under the age of 18, which correlates with data from statutory agencies.

- In 2024/25 we commissioned the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit to engage grassroots stakeholders and develop a Lower-Level Concerns Policy for County FAs and grassroots clubs. This Policy will be shared with County FAs in 2025/26 to drive greater consistency in their management of lower-level concerns. The focus will then be on grassroots clubs, professional and semi-professional leagues and clubs for the remainder of this strategy cycle.

The FA Quality Assurance Manager attended County FA regional networking meetings to provide key findings from Prevalence Data and Case Reviews and to support practice development opportunities.

The FA Safeguarding Case Management Team had refresher training on assessing sexually-harmful behaviours in July 2025.

All case work is subject to quality assurance within our dedicated FA Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework, with learning used to evolve our practice standards.

Action 4.3

Work to ensure systems provide easy access to relevant data e.g. safeguarding, discipline, club visits.

Relevant data was accessed via different systems and user-friendly dashboards. Safeguarding case data was accessible via the newly- launched Case Management System; discipline data and safeguarding club visit data was maintained and accessible via The FA's Whole Game System. The process for recording safeguarding club visit data from 2025/26, will be managed via a Smartsheet process.

County FAs draw from all of these datasets to inform their interventions. Ensuring that data is available in accessible formats to help County FAs to draw out actionable insight is front of mind as systems evolve further from 2025/26 onwards.

Action 4.4

Review and where possible strengthen safeguarding arrangements re: agents, intermediaries and talent scouts.

This work is scheduled to commence in 2025-28.

Case Study

SHARING CASE THEMES AND TRENDS

Safeguarding conferences and networking meetings are important mechanisms through which the themes and learnings from cases are shared in football.

Each season The FA delivers a safeguarding conference for its County FA and National Schools Football Association partners, who oversee and deliver grassroots football and schools football competitions. The conference seeks to provide inspirational, innovative and impactful CPD content for those in designated roles who attend – safeguarding officers, CEOs, board leads and their respective deputies.

For the past few conferences, information has been shared on the themes arising from national policing data and the cases that The FA manages. This is to ensure that delegates are aware of the types of issues that arise through football (concerns coming to light in football, when abuse has taken place outside of the game) and in football (when abuse happens in a football context).

The day-to-day reality is that the vast majority of children and adults playing football have a fun, safe and inclusive experience. However, we do have a regular flow of referrals, which is a positive indicator that a safeguarding system is working and we must respond to the risks identified through national policing, sport and football data. Among these referrals, one of the most concerning behaviours that The FA's Safeguarding Case Management Team risk-assess and manage – in conjunction with the statutory agencies, County FAs, league and clubs – is sexual abuse..

In this connection, Pete Hornby, Deputy Director and Tracey Watkinson, Partnership and Safeguarding Manager, NPCC Hydrant Programme and the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce presented on the national picture re Child Sexual Abuse offences. This provided a snapshot of the scale and nature of these offences, including offences committed by children.

Marcella Leonard MBE delivered a powerful keynote, which built on the policing and FA data. With over 35 years' experience in child, adult, public safeguarding and protection, Marcella is a qualified social worker with additional professional training in psychosexual therapy, trauma therapy, sexual and violent risk assessing. Her thought-provoking session on 'Assessing Sexual Behaviours: What is appropriate/inappropriate/harmful?' firmly held delegates' attention.

“Ensuring policy makers and practitioners in football understand the current scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse and exploitation, is critical to keeping children safe in the game. Having the opportunity to share key data and the objectives of the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce via this conference, helped us to reach the key bodies responsible for grassroots football in England, which is fantastic.”

Tracey Watkinson, Partnership and Safeguarding Manager, NPCC Hydrant Programme and the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce



The content covered topics such as the definition of sexual harm, the sexual-behaviour continuum of potential harm to self and/or others and assessing harmful behaviour. Threading through this was a narrative about child-on-child harmful sexual behaviour, which national policing data shows has been on the rise in education and community settings. This information highlighted why a young person may engage in harmful sexual behaviour, the stages of engaging in these kinds of behaviours, and the AIM 3 Assessment of Adolescent Harmful Sexual Behaviour (Leonard & Hackett 2019).

It's important our football networks are aware of these developments, because it doesn't matter what the nature of the behaviour is, if it's prevalent in society, then the likelihood is that we will see some of this behaviour in football settings.

The session was invaluable continuing professional development for delegates with professional safeguarding backgrounds and eye opening and enlightening for those with predominantly football backgrounds.

Right are three of the slides from Marcella Leonard's keynote speed at The FA Safeguarding Conference in the year under review.

Core Principles of AIM3 (Leonard & Hackett 2019)

Seek to understand the HSB within the wider functioning of the young person

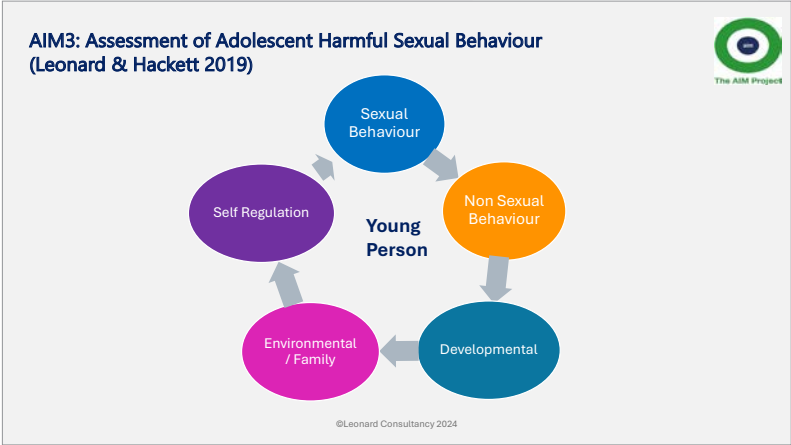
Analyse the profile of the young person considering all their life domains including within their sport

Gaining a profile of the young person to identify the specific areas for safety planning and interventions

Review the AIM3 profile after intervention to assess progress and continue to target specific

Gender neutral and able to be used with race / culture allowing for unique considerations within items

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Importance of Understanding the Young Person and their pathway to Engaging in Harmful Sexual Behaviour

- Recognises the origins of why a person engages in sexual abusive behaviour often lies in their own life experiences
- Recognises the need to see beyond the behaviour to understand what needs the behaviour meets for the person
- To understand what support systems are influencing the person both positively and negatively to assist the person from committing further sexual abuse
- Relying solely on static determinations of low, medium and high risk provide minimal assistance to child protection decision making in terms of working in partnership with the family in recognizing change due to age, maturity, environmental, contextual and societal influences
- It informs the identification of individualized interventions for the person and their family which enhances their effectiveness

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Marcella Leonard MBE gave a powerful keynote speech at the annual FA Safeguarding Conference, focusing on various aspects of child sexual abuse.



“It was an honour to deliver one of the keynote inputs at the FA Safeguarding Conference, because it was to a room of energised safeguarding personnel who were engaged and showed a willingness to reflect on their personal and professional perspectives of the challenging topic. That means there is a motivation to transfer the learning gained to their role which enhances the quality of their safeguarding practice”.

Marcella Leonard, MBE

REPORTING CONCERNS

If a child, young person or adult is in immediate danger, the advice is **ALWAYS** to call 999.

Anyone who has a safeguarding concern at any level of the game, related to a child and/or adult at risk, including child-on-child abuse, or the behaviour of an adult towards an under-18-year-old, or an adult who may be at risk of harm in football, must refer it to The FA's safeguarding team via Safeguarding@TheFA.com.

Anyone who is concerned about misconduct between adults in grassroots football and NLS Steps 5-6, should report the concerns to their County FA. In men's and women's professional football and NLS Steps 1-4, concerns should be reported to The FA Integrity team via integrity@TheFA.com

The safeguarding and integrity teams are staffed by professionals who are experienced in dealing with these concerns.

It is important to state that anything urgent, where there may be an immediate risk of harm to a child, or an adult at risk, must be reported to the police, children or adult social care in your area.

Referring non-immediate risk of harm concerns can be done via a club, league or County FA/Affiliated Association – all have a Designated Safeguarding Person. Alternatively, The FA can be emailed directly at Safeguarding@TheFA.com

If clubs or the County FA DSO cannot be contacted, call the NSPCC Helpline for expert advice and support on 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Concerns that someone may be behaving inappropriately or seeking to groom a child in an online environment should be reported to www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre. Reports made there will be directed to the team at the National Crime Agency. The relevant County FA should also be informed, or The FA at Safeguarding@TheFA.com

Victims of non-recent abuse in football should contact the NSPCC or The FA at Safeguarding@TheFA.com

WHISTLE-BLOWING

Whistleblowing can be used as an early warning system or when it's recognised that appropriate actions have not been taken. It is about revealing and raising concerns over misconduct or malpractice within an organisation or within an independent structure associated with it.

Anyone with concerns about an individual or an organisation's practice can email The FA via safeguarding@TheFA.com.










Alternatively, concerns can be reported direct to the Police or Children's Social Care, or to The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line, which offers free advice and support to professionals with concerns about how child protection issues are being handled in their own or another organisation.

Email - help@nspcc.org.uk or via **0800 028 0285**

Or call the general NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about safeguarding measures in football – and in general – please contact the organisations below. All relevant phone numbers and email addresses can be found by visiting the specific organisation's website.

	www.TheFA.com/football-rules-governance/safeguarding
COUNTY FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS	A list of all County FAs and contact details is available here . Click on the specific County FA website to obtain the email address of the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO).
	www.premierleague.com/safeguarding
	https://www.premierleague.com/en/footballandcommunity/morethanagame/premier-league-foundation/safeguarding
	www.efl.com/governance/safeguarding
	www.eflinthecommunity.com/privacy-policy/
	https://www.wslfootball.com/
	www.thepfa.com <i>Note – services only available to PFA members</i>
	www.leaguemanagers.com <i>Note – services only available to LMA members</i>
	www.leaguecoaches.com <i>Note – services only available to LCA members</i>

To read about football bodies' responsibilities and accountabilities, Appendix 1 and 2, from pages 31 to 35 inclusive of the document you're reading.

	www.premierleague.com/referees <i>Note – services only available to PGMO members</i>
	https://www.anncrafttrust.org/
	www.childline.org.uk
	www.nspcc.org.uk
	https://thecpsu.org.uk/
	www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

ADDITIONAL SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

The PFA Survivor Support Advocate

Survivor Support Advocate offering support and signposting for victims of all forms of child abuse in grassroots and professional football.

E: SupportAdvocate@thepfa.com

The FA Benevolent Fund

Apart from its general remit, the Fund has provided financial assistance to survivors and is open to new applications. You can read more about the Fund and football's other discretionary funding sources [here](#).

E: benevolentfund@TheFA.com



FOR ALL

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